

Stewardship Based Fundraising

By John Mathews

The society in which we live is full of twists and turns. What people once thought was stable and secure is now shaky. There seems to be no part of the economy safe from financial fluctuations. Experts warn that the continued increase of national debt is unsustainable while law makers argue over plans to fix the problems. The great recession in the U. S. from December 2007-June 2009¹ is called this generation's Great Depression and is evidenced by the fact that the "housing crash has been larger and faster than the one during the Great Depression," says Paul Dales, senior economist at Capital Economics.²

Books like *The Experience Economy*³ and *Let Them Eat Cake*,⁴ lead to the conclusion that retailers focus on the experience as being more important than the products being sold in the 21st century. Some believe society now changes as fast as technology. Organizational structures that have served institutions for decades are not working. There are more not-for-profits set up every year and in recent years over 200 churches have gone bankrupt.⁵ The 21st century requires that our paradigms and plans be able to change and shift on short notice, perhaps as often as every six months in order to survive. This is the environment congregations face as they consider the financing of building facilities and supporting mission.

How does a local Adventist church finance major building projects in such an uncertain financial environment? Faced with an "experience economy," how can the church have a successful fundraising experience? Your congregation must have financial support to successfully operate its ministries and maintain facilities. The key to success lies in using principles of fundraising based on stewardship. In a way, conducting fundraising campaigns for such activities seems almost paradoxical since God is the Owner of everything. There will be some opposed for a variety of reasons much to the frustration of others who are trying to finance a specific project. Never-the-less, there are times when the church finds itself involved in fundraising.

The church must be guided by spiritual principles that have a Biblical foundation as it endeavors to provide finances for its projects and ministries. Scripture gives such guidelines through examples for fundraising that are rooted in Stewardship. Stewardship is an ongoing, day by day, spiritual lifestyle experience where we learn that all we have is given to us by God. It is when we fit all the facets of our lives together so that the will of God can be revealed in the Christian life. In the area of money,

¹ msnbc.com staff and news service reports, 9/20/2010. http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/39269753/ns/business-eye_on_the_economy/t/great-recession-over-research-group-says/. 9/28/2011.

² Forrest Jones, June 15, 2011. <http://www.moneynews.com/StreetTalk/CNBC-Housing-Crisis-Officially/2011/06/15/id/400131>. 9/28/2011.

³ B. Joseph Pine III and James H. Gilmore, *The Experience Economy*, Harvard Business School Press, Boston, MA. 1999.

⁴ Pamela N. Danziger, *Let Them Eat Cake*, Dearborn Trade Publishing, 2005

⁵ Shelly Banjo. "Since 2008, nearly 200 religious facilities have been foreclosed on by banks, up from eight during the previous two years and virtually none in the decade before that, according to real-estate services firm **CoStar Group**, Inc. Analysts and bankers say hundreds of additional churches face financial struggles so severe they could face foreclosure or bankruptcy in the near future." <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704115404576096151214141820.html>. 9/28/2011

stewardship is the management of God's earthly possessions. Our first responsibility as stewards is to return the tithe. Then we are invited to give offerings as we are blessed. Our relationship with returning tithes and offerings reflects individual honesty and gratitude. The repetition of these acts demonstrate a growing in grace, a deepening of spiritual commitment, and an understanding that financially supporting God's work is really about the relationship we have with God and the money we manage.

What has just been described is the stewardship baseline for financial support of any church that has a program to move God's mission forward. However, such a church program will eventually need additional funds beyond the normal returning of tithe and the giving of offerings. These additional and special funds are often used to buy property, build schools, churches, or remodel existing structures. The best way to bring these projects to reality, I will call, "Christian fundraising." It is a highly specialized, organized method by which the church focuses on providing members and friends with the opportunity to participate financially in supporting the vision of the church for the construction of facilities. Leadership and members needing additional funds must recognize that the Bible states, "*But all things must be done properly and in an orderly manner.*"⁶ A congregation that embarks on a major project or expansion of facilities, regardless of the scope, would be well advised to consider developing a spiritual, efficient, and realistic fundraising plan because "every act of self-sacrifice strengthens the spirit of beneficence in the giver's heart...."⁷ God is not the author of financial confusion in building structures to advance His mission. A careful fundraising plan will safe guard the local church against bad decisions and financial disaster assuring that no reproach will come upon the work of God.

The concepts in this handbook set forth a "how to guide" and presents the best methods for Christian fundraising that will enable congregations to advance the cause of God in an organized and dignified manner. Some projects may seem impossible but leaders and congregations "are to lay right hold of the work, making those things which appear impossibilities possibilities."⁸ To accomplish this there must be a plan. Meeting financial challenges are not impossible with dedication, organization and generosity. God has entrusted us with the money to push forward heaven's work on earth. Years ago Ellen G. White wrote this bold statement regarding a building project in Washington, D.C.: "there should be no delay. The cause of God demands your assistance. We ask you, as the Lord's stewards, to put His means into circulation, to provide facilities by which many will have the opportunity of learning what is truth."⁹ There is no better way to invest your money than in the cause of God.

Jesus tells a parable, I call the "tower builder," that clearly shows that successful discipleship will cost and requires one to count the cost of such a decision. What builder "intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it."¹⁰ Jesus counted the cost in saying "yes" to His Father's will in saving humanity. While this parable is referring to the cost of discipleship, we have a pointed illustration understood and used by Jesus that would be appropriate counsel for congregations to count the cost of any project undertaken and to see that there are funds to

⁶ 1 Corinthians 14:40, New American Standard Bible, 1995.

⁷ E. G. White, *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 341

⁸ E. G. White, *Counsel on Stewardship*, p 44.

⁹ Ibid. *Pacific Union Recorder*, August 11, 1904.

¹⁰ Luke 14:28 (KJV)

finish it, "Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build, and was not able to finish.'¹¹

Having a plan to accomplish the task and proceeding to complete the task in an organized manner are important principles of stewardship. A good plan will enhance the credibility of the project with the congregation and careful implementation increases the accountability for those leading the fundraising. When the call is made to financially support the project and be involved in the method of fundraising, remember that credibility and accountability will inspire members to "give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver."¹² In the Old Testament Moses gave a direct appeal for the construction of the sanctuary to the "whole Israelite community" as God commanded that "everyone who is willing is to bring an offering..."¹³ This is an example of a general appeal and a willing response. Another illustration happened years later when David said, "...I have of mine own proper good, of gold and silver, which I have given to the house of my God, over and above all that I have prepared for the holy house."¹⁴ Here is an example of leadership giving willingly toward the building of the temple. Neither example shows an impulsive approach. Making urgent calls to raise money is not the best method.¹⁵ The materials for the tabernacle in the wilderness and the temple built by Solomon were obtained by everyone uniting to participate in the task. They had a plan. This handbook presents an organized way by which members and leaders may give to a major project that will bring success.

One of the best examples of securing finances for a major project is recorded in the book of Nehemiah. The story is inspirational and compelling for it shows the need, vision, dedication and passion of leadership, workers and even the king. The following facts reveal what Nehemiah did that was so powerful in the successful experience of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. He prayed to the God of heaven concerning the magnitude of the task. His request to the king was designed in the most careful manner so as to win his favor. "Nehemiah did not depend upon uncertainty"¹⁶ and was bold in asking for further assistance from the king. What were the results? "He obtained all that he asked or even desired."¹⁷ "His prayer had been answered in such a way as to show that the plan was of the Lord."¹⁸ "Moreover I said unto the king, If it please the king, let letters be given me to the governors beyond the river, that they may convey me over till I come into Judah: and a letter unto Asaph the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the palace which *appertained* to the house, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall enter into. And the king granted me, according to the good hand of my God upon me."¹⁹ Imagine what would happen if you presented the project to the Lord in earnest prayer showing Him the magnitude of the need. He would give leadership the passion to present a clear vision to ask not only members to give but also the community. God would bless beyond what we desired.

¹¹ Luke 14: 29-30 (KJV)

¹² 2 Corinthians 9: 7 (KJV)

¹³ Exodus 35:4-29 (NIV)

¹⁴ 1 Chronicles 29: 1-20 (KJV)

¹⁵ E. G. White, *Testimonies to the Church*, Vol. 3, p. 510.

¹⁶ EGW, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 634.

¹⁷ EGW, *Signs of the Times*, October 20, 1887.

¹⁸ EGW, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 638.

¹⁹ Nehemiah 2: 7,8 (KJV)

The above examples are not the only Biblical principles of fundraising that have their foundation in stewardship. There are the examples of Paul asking believers in the New Testament to remember the poor in Judea and believers in Jerusalem.²⁰ Jesus was not uncertain or ambiguous when He said, “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”²¹ This profound insight goes to the core of our relationship to God because possessions and wealth can capture the heart. Having our treasure and heart connected reveals a spiritual experience that will result in action. In an “experience economy” these Biblical principles are valuable and will serve as a stewardship foundation for guiding your congregation in understanding how to use modern fundraising techniques as they are applied to the local church. If this handbook is followed the local church will be more successful in having the financial resources to accomplish its God given task. These principles will bring success and the blessing of God if they are prayerfully and humbly implemented.

The process of funding your local project is about to begin. There is no magical formula or mathematical equation that will make this wonderful project happen. It will require a lot of hard work on the part of leaders and members. Countless hours will be spent in committees, discussions, prayer, organizing and then implementing the plan. This handbook is designed to assist you in these areas. The results and success of your project will show what a difference people can make in the lives of others. Ultimately, fundraising is love in action and is the foundation of stewardship and really the key to any successful fundraising project or church activity.

*(To get *Successful Fundraising. A guide for local churches* order through AdventSource.org)*

²⁰ Galatians 2: 10; Acts 11: 29-30; Romans 15:26

²¹ Matthew 6:21